

**BOISE DISTRICT (BD) BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)
RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAC)**

Foothills Learning Center

Boise, Idaho

December 14, 2005

Draft Minutes

Council Members Present: Gilbert Green, Robert Amidon, John Robison, Dale Dixon, Neil Rimbey, Nate Helm, Margaret Soulen- Hinson, Richard Raymondi, Donna Bennett, Robert Baker.

Council Members Absent: Brenda Richards, Christopher Salove, Ted Howard, Grant Simmonds, Patric Cudmore.

BLM Advisory Present: Jerry Taylor, BD District Manager; Shelley Davis-Brunner, State RAC Coordinator.

Other BLM Staff Present: John Hatch, Resource Advisor; Ron Kay, Owyhee Field Office Manager; Mitch Jaurena, Bruneau Field Office Manager; Rosemary Thomas, Four Rivers Field Office Manager; Mike O'Donnell, Planning & Environment Coordinator; John Sullivan, Birds of Prey NCA Manager; Susan Hayman, Facilitator; Brad Bowen, Fire Operations Manager; Joan Howard, Bruneau Range Assistant; Frank Jenks, Outdoor Recreation Planner; John Augsburger, Wildlife Biologist.

Other: Becky Desmond, Notetaker.

Statements attributed to individuals are not direct quotes unless so indicated. Also, for new members' information, the notetaker does not provide detailed notes on items for which the presenter has provided a handout. Titles of handouts and other items included in members' meeting notebooks are listed in the appendix.

COUNCIL BUSINESS, GENERAL INFORMATION, AND OPENING

REMARKS: Shelley Davis- Brunner gave an update on MJ Byrne, the regular RAC coordinator, who underwent surgery during Thanksgiving break. She is back in Boise and will resume her regular duties following a period of recuperation. Jerry Taylor thanked Ms. Davis-Brunner and Joan Howard for helping with the RAC meeting in Ms. Byrne's absence.

Ms. Davis-Brunner then introduced Paul Woods from the City of Boise Parks and Recreation Department. Mr. Woods has overseen the Foothills Land Acquisition program in partnership with other land agencies since 1992. He discussed new Foothills Learning Center, an educational facility opened on April 22, 2005. The Center is a public-private partnership including Boise City, Ada County, the BLM, United Water, Boise Cascade, Audubon Society, and Idaho Power. It was built to provide an educational center to help people "change their behavior to benefit management of the foothills environment." Since its opening, more than 2000 children have toured the center, learning about noxious weeds, fire safety, proper trail behavior, and responsibility for pets in the foothills.

Gilbert Green, acting RAC chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked all RAC members, including new ones, to introduce themselves. Mr. Taylor announced

that he is now the official Boise District Manager, having been the Acting Manager for most of the past year.

HOT TOPICS: Mr. Taylor said the hottest topic is still the demand that litigation is making on BLM's staff, preventing it from doing the very work that is required to avoid future litigation. Most of the litigation concerns Owyhee County grazing allotments and is requiring BLM staff presence several weeks out of each month. Mr. Taylor said that solving this problem in light of shrinking budgets will require "thinking outside the box" and asked the RAC for any suggestions that would encourage any groups that are willing to work with BLM. He said that BLM, to be defensible in court, has to do credible NEPA analysis based on sound assessments, determinations, and monitoring, all of which requires staff on the ground, not in court. The main litigant is Western Watersheds.

Several RAC members suggested more public education on what BLM does to benefit the land--its success stories. Neil Rimbey said there was no magic "easy" button, but that laws should be changed to make it harder for litigants to be reimbursed. Robert Amidon said interested parties, even if they agreed with initial decisions, HAD to sue in order to stay involved in the process. Mitch Jaurena said the litigants are exercising their rights.

Mr. Taylor said that "in court, the public's voice is lost." He said the biggest lesson he has learned is that people who are willing to work together and collaborate can generate tremendous energy. He hopes this RAC can be such a force.

REVIEW OF 2006 BUDGET PROCESS: John Hatch, BLM resource advisor, provided a handout outlining the Boise District budget and the budgetary process. He said that thanks to Idaho BLM State Director K Lynn Bennett, more of the budget provided by the government is in "base" dollars, rather than "earmarked" dollars. "Earmarks" are dollars allocated for specific projects such as sage grouse, the Birds of Prey Conservation Area, OHV use on public lands, or a particular recreation purpose. He said in a "period of declining budgets," BLM is trying to figure out how to deal with a + or- 5% decrease in purchasing power per year over the past several years. A big problem is dealing with "unknowns" such as the recently passed Energy Policy Act, which might re-allocate money from non-energy-producing states to energy-producing states.

Nate Helm said he would like a comparison of the national appropriations for BLM compared to the district allocation. Mr. Green reminded the RAC that he and Brenda Richards were still working on a letter from the RAC to Idaho's congressional delegation regarding budget problems within BLM and the effect it has on managing the public resource.

ACTION: For the next RAC meeting, BLM will provide a more detailed outline of how it is dealing with the 5% budget decline, including its TAO (Table of Organization) and how it will fill vacancies.

CURRENT FIELD OFFICE ISSUE UPDATES AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Four Rivers Field Office: Rosemary Thomas, field office manager, summarized on-going grazing allotment activities. Her office is working on its RMP (Resource Management Plan), and is working through a ten-year cycle on standards and guides. Watershed areas that are coming up include the Payette River and the Boise River, which involves 325 allotments with 360 total permittees. She is working on six forestry and fuels projects and 13 vegetation rehabilitation projects this year. She also provided a handout updating the LEPA (slickspot peppergrass) CCA (Candidate Conservation Agreement). Its main message is that Boise District is “actively implementing the CCA conservation measures” and remains committed to the partnership agreement as a way to recover the species and preclude its listing as an endangered species.

Other issues: Mountain Home is starting up a new sage grouse local working group. The Foothills Land Exchange is now legislated and introduced to Congress. The Rocky Canyon land exchange is questionable because it now needs a new appraisal and land values have skyrocketed. She said BLM is constantly being approached by land developers for possible exchanges everywhere in the valley. The new Energy Policy Act may call for a national look at “energy corridors.” Wind energy projects are increasing, but mostly on private land so far because of less red tape.

Bruneau Field Office: Mr. Jaurena said the Raft River Powerline Project is headed toward completion and that Western Watersheds had numerous objections and may chose to challenge on its sage grouse section. Mr. Jaurena will start up his RMP process in January. The standards and guides determinations for grazing allotments are on track. He reported that his staff spent all summer in the field and that he used contractors for specific reasons. This requires significant oversight to “get the right skills and experience for the right tasks with a measurable output.” There were two fires which will require reseeding in sage grouse country.

ACTION: Mr. Jaurena will provide copies of the sage grouse sections of the Raft River Powerline EA to Mr. Raymondi, chair of the RAC subcommittee on sage grouse. Copies were also requested by Mr. Helm and Donna Bennett.

Owyhee Field Office: Ron Kay provided a handout summarizing his office’s activities which is fairly self-explanatory. He said that anyone can be involved in a grazing decision as “an intervener” without suing. He pointed out that 10,000 pages of paperwork were required by the FOIA and discovery process for each of the six upcoming administrative hearings, and that six copies of each were needed for all the parties involved. It has changed the BLM’s entire way of doing business.

Other: John Robison, on behalf of the Idaho Conservation League, thanked Mr. Kay for BLM’s responsiveness to its concerns in the Silver City area regarding soil disturbance in connection to the juniper control project there. Mr. Rimbey also complimented the BLM for locating the Owyhee Field Office in Marsing, making it more responsive to the local community.

OHV USE AND TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT: Frank Jenks, BLM outdoor recreation planner, provided a handout showing the status of OHV

transportation planning in the Boise District as of December 2005. He also presented a CD showing pictures of trails in the Owyhee Front before and after treatment under the five-year deferred maintenance project, which is in its third year. He said OHV use has grown exponentially along with population growth in Idaho and that it needs to be channeled and controlled rather than stopped. BLM has learned it must “provide a network of maintained, organized, and signed trails” for its mission of providing the “best recreational opportunity without negatively affecting biological and cultural assets.” The goal of the maintenance project is to maintain 500 miles of trail per year, progressively improving them to make them sustainable. However, it is estimated that approximately 20 miles of new unauthorized trails are created each year in the Front, which makes it difficult to follow a 2003 GPS inventory of already existing roads and trails.

Ms. Bennett asked about areas with known sage grouse leks. Mr. Jenks said BLM is still considering whether to “close” or “limit” those trails but that there would be time for public review of the plan. The Environmental Assessment is to be issued by 2007. Ms. Bennett said that the public needs to be educated about responsible OHV use in the Owyhee Front area much as it already has in the Boise Foothills. Mr. Robison said enforcement was also needed. Mr. Taylor said BLM was changing its approach to law enforcement, using “saturation” patrols rather than isolated patrols. He said there were organized groups of responsible citizens in the Boise Foothills that patrolled the areas, and Mr. Jaurena added that BLM does partnership enforcement such as with the tribes in the Duck Valley Reservation area.

Fees can only be charged if a certain level of amenity is offered at trailheads. Mr. Helm said a precedent for increasing state license fees has already been set by certain organizations such as the snowmobilers, as long as they can see what the benefit is.

ACTION: Mr. Jenks will provide the RAC members with a copy of his CD presentation at its next meeting.

WORKING LUNCH

Mr. Green asked for approval of the minutes from the August 23, 2005 minutes. The group approved a motion by Mr. Rimbey and seconded by Ms. Bennett to do this.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (covered by main agenda items; no separate reports)

PUBLIC COMMENTS (none at this meeting)

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR DRAFT RMP, SNAKE RIVER BIRDS OF PREY NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA EIS: John Sullivan, area manager; Mike O'Donnell, team lead; and Susan Hayman, facilitator, presented the draft preferred alternative for RAC members. They supplied a paper copy and a slide show of the plan. They asked for RAC support for moving the process forward, getting the draft EI out to the public. They emphasized that these alternatives do not represent the final position of BLM.

They explained the alternatives for the categories of: vegetation, livestock grazing, boundary change, avoidance areas, military training, shooting restrictions, special recreation management areas, wild and scenic river designation, OHV area designations, and utility corridors, along with some additional management actions. The Snake River Birds of Prey NCA is a “dominant use” area rather than a “multiple use” area and activities must be compatible with sustaining raptor habitat.

ACTION: Margaret Soulen-Hinson moved to accept and move forward the draft RMP including the preferred alternative. Mr. Robison seconded the motion and the group approved it. There are questions remaining that RAC members said needed to be addressed: water rights adjudication near the area; close collaboration with users when BLM plans restoration specifics; education of the public regarding any new shooting restrictions; and keeping OHV proliferation of unauthorized routes to a minimum while planning route designations.

BREAK

SAGE GROUSE HABITAT MANAGEMENT: John Augsburger, wildlife biologist from the State office, provided a handout showing pieces of the powerpoint presentation given to the SAC (State Sage Grouse Advisory Committee). He said the plan is scheduled to be made available to the public on Feb. 15, 2006, followed by a 30-day review period. The lead agency on the plan is the State Fish and Game Department, and there is a letter coming from BLM State Director K Lynn Bennett which asks for RAC input to BLM’s comments on the plan.

Mr. Augsburger said the goal of the plan is sustainability of sage grouse habitat. This new state plan is different from the one originally written in 2004, when sage grouse were expected to be listed as an endangered species. Now, the plan is meant to be used as a toolbox by local working groups, and “will apply--whoever you are.” He said the definition of “consensus” is most important when reading through the plan, and that one must read through the entire draft for it to make sense.

Ms. Thomas asked what scientific basis was used for data in the plan. Mr. Augsburger said some came from WFWA research, some from local research done in Idaho, and some from accepted literature in the field. The Fish and Game department will be the repository for all data, and the University of Idaho also has a public website for it. The final plan will be available on the Fish and Game website, will be user-friendly, and will include links to other sites. Mr. Augsburger said the tribes needed a heads-up and Ms. Thomas requested that he ask the Fish and Game Dept. to present information to them at the January 19, 2006 “Wings and Roots” meeting. (However, The Fish and Game Dept. plans to meet Jan. 12, 2006 to decide whether to go ahead with the release of the plan.)

(Note: The above presentation was not the presentation of Owyhee County Sage Grouse Local Working Group’s projects that the RAC originally requested, and that was on the written agenda.)

Miscellaneous items and new agenda items:

MJ Byrne wished everyone a Merry Christmas by phone and pledged to still host a “holiday” party after the holidays. Joan Howard has travel vouchers if any RAC member needs them. The next meeting date will be February 21, 2006. Agenda items will include election of officers and possibly a discussion on ways to coordinate with other RAC’s.

ACTION: BLM will provide a list of RAC subcommittees and their members to the next meeting so that new members can be appointed to any vacancies.

Mr. Green adjourned the meeting after thanking Ms. Bruner, Ms. Howard, and Ms. Desmond for their work.

Minutes prepared by
Becky Desmond, Notetaker

Certified by

/s/ Gilbert Green Date: March 21, 2006
Gilbert Green
Acting RAC Chairman

/s/ Jerry Taylor Date: March 21, 2006
Jerry Taylor
Boise District Manager

Appendix (All were handouts.)

1. Minutes from August 23, 2005 RAC meeting.
2. BD Budget and BLM Budgeting Process. (John Hatch)
3. LEPA update. (Rosemary Thomas)
4. Owyhee Field Office Outline. (Ron Kay)
5. Status of Transportation Planning in the BD. Dec. 2005. (Frank Jenks)
6. Snake River Birds of Prey NCA Draft RMP--EIS. (Mike Sullivan)
7. Conservation Plan for the Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho. (John Augsburg)